

Official faces probe after 'racist' jokes

Stand-up gags about travellers and Muslims 'ruined' council talent show

Rhiannon Evans

editorial@gazettenews.co.uk

A FAMILY talent show was "ruined" after a Brentwood council officer allegedly made racist comments as part of a stand-up sketch.

According to audience members at Brentwood's Got Talent on Friday night, the council officer made one particular offensive joke about the Muslim community and referred to travellers as "pikeys".

Winners of the group category Kayzar Dance were said to be particularly offended by the comments and, in front of a packed audience, asked the officer to apologise for his comments, before they accepted their prize.

Witnesses say the officer then took to the stage to apologise.

A representative from Kayzar Dance said they did not wish to comment on the incident.

The event, which took place at Brentwood Theatre on Shenfield Road, is organised by Brentwood Council each year to celebrate the town's talent.

An audience member -- who

wished to remain anonymous -- said: "At the end, the judges were deciding on the results and this guy came on with a clapometer, but before he starts, he started cracking some jokes."

First came jokes about Crays Hill travellers and the word "pikey" was used, she said.

"At that, we all kind of looked at each other and thought 'I hope there are no gipsies here'."

Following the joke about Muslims, she said the atmosphere became even more uncomfortable.

'Near the mark'

"Again, we all thought 'My God, that's a bit near the mark'," she said.

"They obviously didn't check his material, they just let him on to do whatever he wanted."

"I thought 'I hope there are no Muslims here', but it turned out some of the performers were Muslim."

"It made it very uncomfortable at the time because it just went deadly silent."

"When the guy from Kayzar asked for an apology my husband

and father said 'hear, hear' and started clapping and quite a few others did as well because at the time, we just thought 'You are really out of order'."

Another witness said: "It totally ruined the whole evening."

"From being a really good evening and everyone was on a high and then all this was said right at the end and it did ruin it -- and in front of all the children."

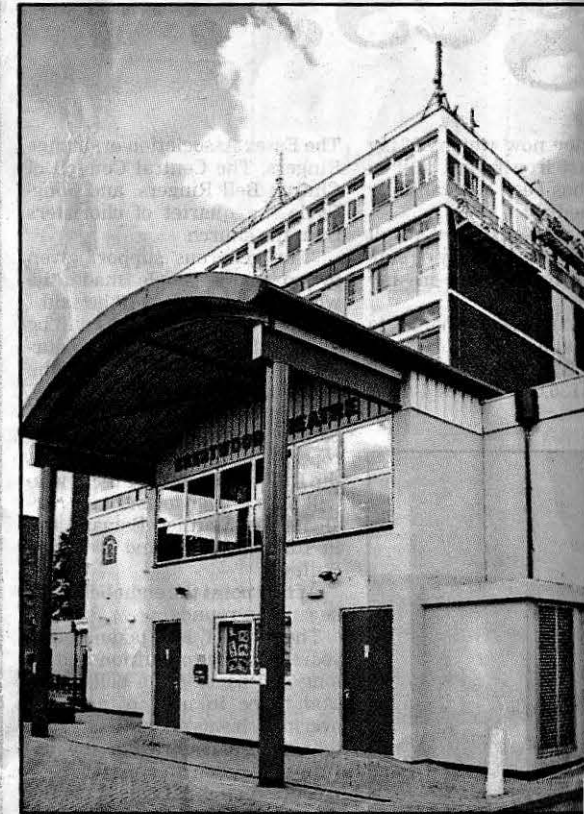
"I just don't think there was any need for the group to ask for a public apology -- I think it should have been a private word."

Secretary of the Brentwood Gypsy Support Group Thomas Acton said he was not aware of the incident but added: "Obviously we object to the use of racist language like pikey."

A spokeswoman for Brentwood Council said: "The council has received a complaint about an incident at the Brentwood's Got Talent event on Friday night."

"It is taking the complaint very seriously and has commenced an investigation into the matter."

"In the light of that, it would be inappropriate to comment further at this stage."



NOT AMUSED: People were offended by comments made at the talent show at Brentwood Theatre.

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